SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK GRAMMATICAL TERMS

Koine Greek, often called Hellenistic Greek, was the common language of the Mediterranean world beginning with Alexander the Great's (336-323 B.C..) conquest and lasting about eight hundred years (300 B.C.-A.D. 500). It was not just a simplified, classical Greek, but in many ways a newer form of Greek that became the second language of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean world.

The Greek of the New Testament was unique in some ways because its users, except Luke and the author of Hebrews, probably used Aramaic as their primary language. Therefore, their writing was influenced by the idioms and structural forms of Aramaic. Also, they read and quoted the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) which was also written in Koine Greek. But the Septuagint was also written by Jewish scholars whose mother tongue was not Greek.

This serves as a reminder that we cannot push the New Testament into a tight grammatical structure. It is unique and yet has much in common with (1) the Septuagint; (2) Jewish writings such as those of Josephus; and (3) the papyri found in Egypt. How then do we approach a grammatical analysis of the New Testament?

The grammatical features of Koine Greek and New Testament Koine Greek are fluid. In many ways it was a time of simplification of grammar. Context will be our major guide. Words only have meaning in a larger context, therefore, grammatical structure can only be understood in light of (1) a particular author's style; and (2) a particular context. No conclusive definitions of Greek forms and structures are possible.

Koine Greek was primarily a verbal language. Often the key to interpretation is the type and form of the VERBALS. In most main clauses the VERB will occur first, showing its preeminence. In analyzing the Greek VERB three pieces of information must be noted: (1) the basic emphasis of the TENSE, VOICE and MOOD (accidence or morphology); (2) the basic meaning of the particular VERB (lexicography); and (3) the flow of the context (syntax).

I. TENSE

A. Tense or aspect involves the relationship of the VERBS to completed action or incomplete action. This is often called "PERFECTIVE" and "IMPERFECTIVE."

1. PERFECTIVE TENSES focus on the occurrence of an action. No further information is given except that something happened! Its start, continuation or culmination is not addressed.
2. IMPERFECTIVE TENSES focus on the continuing process of an action. It can be described in terms of linear action, durative action, progressive action, etc.

B. Tenses can be categorized by how the author sees the action as progressing

1. It occurred = AORIST
2. It occurred and the results abide = PERFECT
3. It was occurring in the past and the results were abiding, but not now = PLUPERFECT
4. It is occurring = PRESENT
5. It was occurring = IMPERFECT
6. It will occur = FUTURE

A concrete example of how these TENSES help in interpretation would be the term "save." It was used in several different tenses to show both its process and culmination:

1. AORIST – "saved" (cf. Rom. 8:24)
2. PERFECT – "have been saved and the result continues" (cf. Eph. 2:5,8)
3. PRESENT – "being saved" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2)
4. FUTURE – "shall be saved" (cf. Rom. 5:9, 10; 10:9)

C. In focusing on VERB TENSES, interpreters look for the reason the original author chose to express himself in a certain TENSE. The standard "no frills" tense was the AORIST. It was the regular "unspecific," "unmarked," or "unflagged" VERB form. It can be used in a wide variety of ways which the context must specify. It simply was stating that something

occurred. The past time aspect is only intended in the INDICATIVE MOOD. If any other TENSE was used, something more specific was being emphasized. But what?

1. PERFECT TENSE. This speaks of a completed action with abiding results. In some ways it was a combination of the AORIST and PRESENT TENSES. Usually the focus is on the abiding results or the completion of an act (example: Eph. 2:5 & 8, "you have been and continue to be saved").
2. PLUPERFECT TENSE. This was like the PERFECT except the abiding results have ceased. Example: John 18:16 "Peter was standing at the door outside."
3. PRESENT TENSE. This speaks of an incomplete or imperfect action. The focus is usually on the continuation of the event. Example: 1 John 3:6 & 9, "Everyone abiding in Him does not continue sinning." "Everyone having been begotten of God does not continue to commit sin."
4. IMPERFECT TENSE. In this tense the relationship to the PRESENT TENSE is analogous to the relationship between the PERFECT and the PLUPERFECT. The IMPERFECT speaks of incomplete action that was occurring but has now ceased or the beginning of an action in the past. Example: Matt. 3:5, "then all Jerusalem were continuing to go out to him" or "then all Jerusalem began to go out to him."
5. FUTURE TENSE. This speaks of an action that was usually projected into a future time frame. It focused on the potential for an occurrence rather than an actual occurrence. It often speaks of the certainty of the event. Example: Matt. 5:4-9, "Blessed are. . .they will . . ."

II. VOICE

A. VOICE describes the relationship between the action of the VERB and its SUBJECT.

B. ACTIVE VOICE was the normal, expected, unemphasized way to assert that the subject was performing the action of the VERB.

C. The PASSIVE VOICE means that the subject was receiving the action of the VERB produced by an outside agent. The outside agent producing the action was indicated in the Greek NT by the following PREPOSITIONS and cases:

1. a personal direct agent by *hupo* with the ABLATIVE CASE (cf. Matt.1:22; Acts 22:30).
2. a personal intermediate agent by *dia* with the ABLATIVE CASE (cf. Matt. 1:22).
3. an impersonal agent usually by *en* with the INSTRUMENTAL CASE.
4. sometimes either a personal or impersonal agent by the INSTRUMENTAL CASE alone.

D. The MIDDLE VOICE means that the subject produces the action of the VERB and is also directly involved in the action of the VERB. It is often called the voice of heightened personal interest. This construction emphasized the subject of the clause or sentence in some way. This construction is not found in English. It has a wide possibility of meanings and translations in Greek. Some examples of the form are:

1. REFLEXIVE – the direct action of the subject on itself. Example: Matt. 27:5 "hanged himself."
2. INTENSIVE – the subject produces the action for itself. Example: 2 Cor. 11:14 "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."
3. RECIPROCAL – the interplay of two subjects. Example: Matt. 26:4 "they counseled with one another."

III. MOOD (or "MODE")

A. There are four MOODS in Koine Greek. They indicate the relation of the VERB to reality, at least within the author's own mind. The MOODS are divided into two broad categories: that which indicated reality (INDICATIVE) and that which indicated potentiality (SUBJUNCTIVE, IMPERATIVE and OPTATIVE).

B. The INDICATIVE MOOD was the normal mood for expressing action that had occurred or was occurring, at least in the author's mind. It was the only Greek mood that expressed a definite time, and even here this aspect was secondary.

C. The SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD expressed probable future action. Something had not yet happened, but the chances were likely that it would. It had much in common with the FUTURE INDICATIVE. The difference was that the SUBJUNCTIVE expresses some degree of doubt. In English this is often expressed by the terms "could," "would," "may," or "might."

D. The OPTATIVE MOOD expressed a wish which was theoretically possible. It was considered one step further from reality than the SUBJUNCTIVE. The OPTATIVE expressed possibility under certain conditions. The OPTATIVE was rare in the New Testament. Its most frequent usage is Paul's famous phrase, "May it never be" (KJV, "God forbid"), used fifteen times (cf. Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14).

E. The IMPERATIVE MOOD emphasized a command which was possible, but the emphasis was on the intent of the speaker. It asserted only volitional possibility and was conditioned on the choices of another. There was a special use of the IMPERATIVE in prayers and 3rd person requests. These commands were found only in the PRESENT and AORIST TENSES in the NT.

F. Some grammars categorize PARTICIPLES as another type of MOOD. They are very common in the Greek NT, usually defined as VERBAL ADJECTIVES. They are translated in conjunction with the main VERB to which they relate. A wide variety was possible in translating PARTICIPLES. It is best to consult several English translations. *The Bible in Twenty Six Translations* published by Baker is a great help here.

G. The AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE was the normal or "unmarked" way to record an occurrence. Any other TENSE, VOICE or MOOD had some specific interpretive significance that the original author wanted to communicate.

IV. For the person not familiar with Greek the following study aids will provide the needed information:

A. Friberg, Barbara and Timothy. *Analytical Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.

B. Marshall, Alfred. *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976.

C. Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.

D. Summers, Ray. *Essentials of New Testament Greek*. Nashville: Broadman, 1950.

E. Academically accredited Koine Greek correspondence courses are available through Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, IL.

V. NOUNS

A. Syntactically, NOUNS are classified by CASE. CASE was that inflected form of a NOUN that showed its relationship to the VERB and other parts of the sentence. In Koine Greek many of the CASE functions were indicated by PREPOSITIONS. Since the CASE form was able to identify several different relationships, the PREPOSITIONS developed to give clearer separation to these possible functions.

B. Greek CASE is categorized in the following eight ways:

1. The NOMINATIVE CASE was used for naming and it usually was the SUBJECT of the sentence or clause. It was also used for PREDICATE NOUNS and ADJECTIVES with the linking VERBS "to be" or "become."
2. The GENITIVE CASE was used for description and usually assigned an attribute or quality to the word to which it was related. It answered the question, "What kind?" It was often expressed by the use of the English PREPOSITION "of."
3. The ABLATIVE CASE used the same inflected form as the GENITIVE, but it was used to describe separation. It usually denoted separation from a point in time, space, source, origin or degree. It was often expressed by the use of the English PREPOSITION "from."
4. The DATIVE CASE was used to describe personal interest. This could denote a positive or negative aspect. Often this was the INDIRECT OBJECT. It was often expressed by the English PREPOSITION "to."

5. The LOCATIVE CASE was the same inflected form as the DATIVE, but it described position or location in space, time or logical limits. It was often expressed by the English PREPOSITIONS "in, on, at, among, during, by, upon, and beside."
6. The INSTRUMENTAL CASE was the same inflected form as the DATIVE and LOCATIVE cases. It expressed means or association. It was often expressed by the English PREPOSITIONS, "by" or "with."
7. The ACCUSATIVE CASE was used to describe the conclusion of an action. It expressed limitation. Its main use was the DIRECT OBJECT. It answered the question, "How far?" or "To what extent?"
8. The VOCATIVE CASE was used for direct address.

VI. CONJUNCTIONS AND CONNECTORS

A. Greek is a very precise language because it has so many connectives. They connect thoughts (CLAUSES, SENTENCES, and PARAGRAPHS). They are so common that their absence (asyndeton) is often exegetically significant. As a matter of fact, these CONJUNCTIONS and CONNECTORS show the direction of the author's thought. They often are crucial in determining what exactly he is trying to communicate.

B. Here is a list of some of the CONJUNCTIONS and CONNECTORS and their meanings (this information has been gleaned mostly from H. E. Dana and Julius K. Mantey's *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*).

1. Time connectors
   a. *epei, epeidē, hopote, hōs, hote, hotan* (subj.) – "when"
   b. *heōs* – "while"
   c. *hotan, epan* (SUBJ.) – "whenever"
   d. *heōs, achri, mechri* (subj.) – "until"
   e. *priv* (INFIN.) – "before"
   f. *hōs* – "since," "when," "as"
2. Logical CONNECTORS
   a. Purpose
      (1) *hina* (SUBJ.), *hopōs* (SUBJ.), *hōs* – "in order that," "that"
      (2) *hōste* (ARTICULAR ACCUSATIVE INFINITIVE) – "that"
      (3) *pros* (ARTICULAR ACCUSATIVE INFINITIVE) or *eis* (ARTICULAR ACCUSATIVE INFINITIVE) – "that"
   b. Result (there is a close association between the grammatical forms of purpose and result)
      (1) *hōste* (INFINITIVE, this is the most common) – "in order that," "thus"
      (2) *hiva* (SUBJ.) – "so that"
      (3) *ara* – "so"
   f. Causal or reason
      (1) *gar* (cause/effect or reason/conclusion) – "for," "because"
      (2) *dioti, hotiy* – "because"
      (3) *epei, epeidē, hōs* – "since"
      (4) *dia* (with accusative) and (with articular infin.) – "because"
   g. Inferential
      (1) *ara, poinun, hōste* – "therefore"
      (2) *dio* (strongest inferential CONJUNCTION) – "on which account," "wherefore," "therefore"
      (3) *oun* – "therefore," "so," "then," "consequently"
      (4) *toinoun* – "accordingly"
   h. Adversative or contrast
      (1) *alla* (strong ADVERSATIVE) – "but," "except"
      (2) *de* – "but," "however," "yet," "on the other hand"
      (3) *kai* – "but"
      (4) *mentoi, oun* – "however"

(5) *plēn* – "never-the-less" (mostly in Luke)
(6) *oun* – "however"

i. Comparison
(1) *hōs, kathōs* (introduce COMPARATIVE CLAUSES)
(2) *kata* (in compounds, *katho, kathoti, kathōsper, kathaper*)
(3) *hosos* (in Hebrews)
(4) *ē* – "than"

j. Continuative or series
(1) *de* – "and," "now"
(2) *kai* – "and"
(3) *tei* –*"and"*
(4) *hina, oun* – "that"
(5) *oun* – "then" (in John)

3. Emphatic usages
a. *alla* – "certainty," "yea," "in fact"
b. *ara* – "indeed," "certainly," "really"
c. *gar* – "but really," "certainly," "indeed"
d. *de* – "indeed"
e. *ean* – "even"
f. *kai* – "even," "indeed," "really"
g. *mentoi* – "indeed"
h. *oun* – "really," "by all means"

VII. CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

A. A CONDITIONAL SENTENCE is one that contains one or more conditional clauses. This grammatical structure aids interpretation because it provides the conditions, reasons or causes why the action of the main VERB does or does not occur. There were four types of CONDITIONAL SENTENCES. They move from that which was assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his purpose to that which was only a wish.

B. The FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE expressed action or being which was assumed to be true from the writer's perspective or for his purposes even though it was expressed with an "if." In several contexts it could be translated "since" (cf. Matt. 4:3; Rom. 8:31). However, this does not mean to imply that all FIRST CLASSES are true to reality. Often they were used to make a point in an argument or to highlight a fallacy (cf. Matt. 12:27).

This context (i.e., 1 Cor. 15:12-19) clearly shows the different ways a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE can be used.

1. Verse 12 is the normal usage of affirming the truth of a statement for the author's purpose.
2. Verses 13,14,15,16,17,18 function in a similar way to a SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE. These do not relate to reality but to false assertions (cf. v. 12).

C. The SECOND CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE is often called "contrary to fact." It states something that was untrue to reality to make a point. Examples:

1. "If He were really a prophet which He is not, He would know who and of what character the woman is who is clinging to Him, but He does not" (Luke 7:39)
2. "If you really believed Moses, which you do not, you would believe me, which you do not" (John 5:46)
3. "If I were still trying to be pleasing to men, which I am not, I would not be a slave of Christ at all, which I am" (Gal. 1:10)

D. The THIRD CLASS speaks of possible future action. It often assumes the probability of that action. It usually implies a contingency. The action of the main VERB is contingent on the action in the "if" clause. Examples from 1 John: 1:6-10; 2:4,6,9,15,20,21,24,29; 3:21; 4:20; 5:14,16.

E. The FOURTH CLASS is the farthest removed from possibility. It is rare in the NT. As a matter of fact, there is no complete FOURTH CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE in which both parts of

the condition fit the definition.

1. An example of a partial FOURTH CLASS is the opening clause in 1 Pet. 3:14.
2. An example of a partial FOURTH CLASS in the concluding clause is Acts 8:31.
3. Another example is 1 Cor. 14:10; 15:37

VIII. PROHIBITIONS

A. The PRESENT IMPERATIVE with MĒ PARTICLE often (but not exclusively) has the emphasis of stopping an act already in process. Some examples:
   1. "stop storing up your riches on earth. . ." (Matt. 6:19)
   2. "stop worrying about your life. . ." (Matt. 6:25)
   3. "stop offering to sin the parts of your bodies as instruments of wrongdoing. . ." (Rom. 6:13)
   4. "you must stop offending the Holy Spirit of God. . ." (Eph. 4:30)
   5. "stop getting drunk on wine. . ." (5:18)

B. The AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE with MĒ PARTICLE has the emphasis of "do not even begin or start an act." Some examples:
   1. "Do not even begin to suppose that. . ." (Matt. 5:17)
   2. "never start to worry. . ." (Matt. 6:31)
   3. "you must never be ashamed. . ." (2 Tim. 1:8).

C. The DOUBLE NEGATIVE with the SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD is a very emphatic negation. "Never, no never" or "not under any circumstance." Some examples: "he will never, no never experience death" (John 8:51); "I will never, no, never. . ." (1 Cor. 8:13).

IX. THE ARTICLE

A. In Koine Greek the DEFINITE ARTICLE "the" had a use similar to English. Its basic function was that of "a pointer," a way to draw attention to a word, name or phrase. The use varies from author to author in the New Testament. The DEFINITE ARTICLE could also function
   1. as a contrasting device like a demonstrative PRONOUN;
   2. as a sign to refer to a previously introduced SUBJECT or person;
   3. as a way to identify the SUBJECT in a sentence with a linking VERB. Examples: "God is Spirit" (John 4:24); "God is light" (1 John 1:5); "God is love" (4:8,16).

B. Koine Greek did not have an INDEFINITE ARTICLE like the English "a" or "an." The absence of the DEFINITE ARTICLE could mean
   1. a focus on the characteristics or quality of something
   2. a focus on the category of something

C. The NT authors varied widely as to how the ARTICLE was employed.

X. WAYS OF SHOWING EMPHASIS IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

A. The techniques for showing emphasis vary from author to author in the New Testament. The most consistent and formal writers were Luke and the author of Hebrews.

B. We have stated earlier that the AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE was standard and unmarked for emphasis, but any other TENSE, VOICE, or MOOD had interpretive significance. This is not to imply that the AORIST ACTIVE INDICATIVE was not often used in a significant grammatical sense. (Example: Rom. 6:10 [twice]).

C. Word order in Koine Greek
   1. Koine Greek was an inflected language which was not dependent, like English, on word order. Therefore, the author could vary the normal expected order to show
      a. what the author wanted to emphasize to the reader
      b. what the author thought would be surprising to the reader
      c. what the author felt deeply about
   2. The normal word order in Greek is still an unsettled issue. However, the supposed normal order is:
      a. for linking VERBS
         (1) VERB

(2) SUBJECT
(3) COMPLEMENT

b. for TRANSITIVE VERBS
(1) VERB
(2) SUBJECT
(3) OBJECT
(4) INDIRECT OBJECT
(5) PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

c. for NOUN PHRASES
(1) NOUN
(2) MODIFIER
(3) PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE

3. Word order can be an extremely important exegetical point. Examples:
a."right hand they gave to me and Barnabas of fellowship." The phrase "right hand of fellowship" is split and fronted to show its significance (Gal. 2:9).
b. "with Christ" was placed first. His death was central (Gal. 2:20).
c. "It was bit by bit and in many different ways" (Heb. 1:1) was placed first. It was how God revealed Himself that was being contrasted, not the fact of revelation.

D. Usually some degree of emphasis was shown by
1. The repetition of the PRONOUN which was already present in the VERB's inflected form. Example: "I, myself, will surely be with you. . ." (Matt. 28:20).
2. The absence of an expected CONJUNCTION, or other connecting device between words, phrases, clauses or sentences. This is called an asyndeton ("not bound"). The connecting device was expected, so its absence would draw attention. Examples:
a. The Beatitudes, Matt. 5:3ff (emphasized the list)
b. John 14:1 (new topic)
c. Romans 9:1 (new section)
d. 2 Cor. 12:20 (emphasize the list)
3. The repetition of words or phrases present in a given context. Examples: "to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12 & 14). This phrase was used to show the work of each person of the Trinity.
4. The use of an idiom or word (sound) play between terms
a. euphemisms – substitute words for taboo subjects, like "sleep" for death (John 11:11-14) or "feet" for male genitalia (Ruth 3:7-8; 1 Sam. 24:3).
b. circumlocutions – substitute words for God's name, like "Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 3:2) or "a voice from heaven" (Matt. 3:17).
c. FIGURES OF SPEECH
(1) impossible exaggerations (Matt. 3:9; 5:29-30; 19:24)
(2) mild over statements (Matt. 3:5; Acts 2:36)
(3) personifications (1 Cor. 15:55)
(4) irony (Gal. 5:12)
(5) poetic passages (Phil. 2:6-11)
(6) sound plays between words
(a) "church"
(i) "church" (Eph. 3:21)
(ii) "calling" (Eph. 4:1,4)
(iii)"called" (Eph. 4:1,4)
(b) "free"
(i) "free woman" (Gal. 4:31)
(ii)"freedom" (Gal. 5:1)
(iii)"free" (Gal. 5:1)
d. idiomatic language – language which is usually cultural and language specific:
(1) figurative use of "food" (John 4:31-34)
(2) figurative use of "Temple" (John 2:19; Matt. 26:61)

(3) Hebrew idiom of comparison, "hate" (Gen. 29:31; Deut. 21:15; Luke 14:26; John 12:25; Rom. 9:13)

(4) "All" versus "many." Compare Isa. 53:6 ("all") with 53:11 & 12 ("many"). The terms are synonymous as Rom. 5:18 and 19 show.

5. The use of a full linguistic phrase instead of a single word. Example: "The Lord Jesus Christ."
6. The special use of *autos*
   a. when with the ARTICLE (attributive position) it was translated "same."
   b. when without the ARTICLE (predicate position) it was translated as an INTENSIVE REFLEXIVE PRONOUN—"himself," "herself," or "itself."

E. The non-Greek reading Bible student can identify emphasis in several ways:
1. The use of an analytical lexicon and interlinear Greek/English text.
2. The comparison of English translations, particularly from the differing theories of translations. Example: comparing a "word-for-word" translation (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV) with a "dynamic equivalent" (Williams, NIV, NEB, REB, JB, NJB, TEV). A good help here would be *The Bible in Twenty-Six Translations* published by Baker.
3. The use of *The Emphasized Bible* by Joseph Bryant Rotherham (Kregel, 1994).
4. The use of a very literal translation
   a. *The American Standard Version* of 1901
   b. *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible* by Robert Young (Guardian Press, 1976).

The study of grammar is tedious but necessary for proper interpretation. These brief definitions, comments and examples are meant to encourage and equip non-Greek reading persons to use the grammatical notes provided in this volume. Surely these definitions are oversimplified. They should not be used in a dogmatic, inflexible manner, but as stepping stones toward a greater understanding of New Testament syntax. Hopefully these definitions will also enable readers to understand the comments of other study aids such as technical commentaries on the New Testament.

We must be able to verify our interpretation based on items of information found in the texts of the Bible. Grammar is one of the most helpful of these items; other items would include historical setting, literary context, contemporary word usage, and parallel passages.

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